

A Feminist Revisionist Reading of Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and Numan Ashour's *Abroad*

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Abstract: This research is a critical analysis of Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and Ashour's *Abroad* which focuses on the concept of the new women in the face of social hypocrisy and capitalist corruption in light of the economic need and lack of employment opportunities among the lower class.

Shaw's deals with the problem of prostitution artistically through the theme of consciences which creates a conflict between a coarse mother Mrs. Warren and cold daughter Miss Vivie Warren and presents the conflict between individualism and social forces.

When we compare Ashour and Shaw on the subject and the idea we find that the theme of the plays in somewhat is different because the difference between prostitutions and leaving the motherland is big, but the purpose are mutually agreed the both playwrights presents and carry many ideas including social hypocrisy, poor economic conditions for some poor classes, The lack of employments opportunities available for the people in their societies especially woman. They also expose the corruption of capitalists and their misuses of the poor. The purpose is also almost agreed the main objective is to purge society of the movement towards a better socialist society.

Mrs. Warren's Profession was written in 1893, and published in *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* sequels (1898). In 1905, this play couldn't be performed for containing obscene issues, so the police of the New York arrested the crew basing on the Comstock Laws of that year. But this play was revived and edited later for five times after its first performance. In *Mrs. Warren's Profession*; Shaw chose prostitution as the basis for his attack on capitalism.

In addition to analyzing the economic evils engendered by a capitalistic society, Shaw examines religion, family, and the concept of "New Woman". Family relationships are explored in the characters of Mrs. Warren and her daughter, Vivie. This play is carrying contradictions such as poverty and wealth, oppression and freedom. The theme of incest has also contributed to strengthen the theme of prostitution. "Our mad society draws back in horror from incest, which is certainly a pressing menace." (Bentley.56)

Ashour's *Abroad (Belad Parah)* was written in 1967, and published in *Plays* 1976, *Abroad* demonstrates his interest in "recording social conflict and revealing patterns of social mobility" (Saleh 338). The play expounds the struggle between classes, the aspirations of each class to maintain its gains or rise to a higher level, a struggle between reactionary represented in capitalism.

"*Abroad*" floats above the movements that live in the heart of the society now. The expression "*Biladbarah*" or abroad is indicative of the general feature of class aspiration from one side and the paradise of the destroyed classes from another side. "*Abroad*" is not confined to that alone but it represents a contradicting thinking which is the resort for those shocked by the progressive thinking in Egypt.

Comparing the two literary works, we will trace some differences in the way each playwright handles his subject matter; which arise from the stark difference between prostitution and leaving motherland. However, both tackle the issues of social hypocrisy, the injustices inflicted the poor in addition to the marginalization of women.

Shaw illustrates the unconventional thoughts and behaviors of Vivie and Mrs. Warren that put them in difficult relationships with other male characters in the play. The male characters are portrayed as antagonists that represent social conventions against the protagonist that represents the "New Woman" who is independent and believes in her own capabilities to achieve her dreams. Sir Georg Croft has a "gentlemanly combination of the most brutal types of city man, sporting man, and man about town" (*Mrs. Warren's Profession*. 61). Rev. Gardner, Mrs. Warren's ex-lover, is a "pretentious, booming, noisy person, hopelessly asserting himself as a father and a clergyman without being able to command respect in either capacity" (*Mrs. Warren's Profession*. 66). Mrs. Warren's denial to reveal the secret about the identity of Vivie's father underlines Crofts and Rev. Gardner's powerless male authority. They cannot assume the duty of a father or a husband as a provider of a secured life that conventionally enables them a power over women.

Besides the corrupted male figures as foils, Shaw characterizes weak and passive male characters: Mr. Praed and Frank Gardner, in contrast with the bold, "masculine" and domineering New Woman personalities of Vivie. Mr. Praed regards himself as "an artist" and tries to persuade Vivie to see the beauty of "the wonderful world art" from art and opera in which it is believed as what "makes womanhood beautiful" (*Mrs. Warren's Profession* 58-59). As a "New Woman", Vivie sees no interest in Praed's world of art, and puts her desire for a mannish lifestyle and profession. The modern young ladies, like Vivie and her business partner Honoria Fraser, prefer a practical and independent way of life for woman that their education and occupational opportunity enable them to make a choice to live independently instead of devoting themselves to the conventional domestic life.

The New Womanish characters are portrayed as professional, liberated and independent against the conventional ones. Therefore, female solidarity and mutual support between Vivie and her mother occupy a special place in the play that reflects how women can empower each other. Ashour focused on the condition of women in their society and how women fought very hard against the limitations that obstructed their way to self-achievement.

We find a great similarity between the characters of Shaw and Ashour, especially in the ideological dimensions between the corruption of the capitalist classes and the weakness and negativity of the poor working classes, so all characters are realistic, so as to serve the theme of the plays. Ashour's play depicts the struggle between capitalism, represented by the Basha, his daughter Zahira, his nephew Nader Bek, the working class represented by Al'ostaa Zalatt, his wife Rahma and his son Ali, who graduated from the Faculty of Engineering, and his daughter Suad, who married Mohammed El Nems (Al'ostaa Zalatt's assistant, and Brother of the wife of Al-Basha's driver), Metwally (Al-Basha's driver) who was loved by Zahira (Al-Basha's daughter) and married her, Al-Basha expelled them from the country.

All the characters of the play- except some few people are correlated to the Egyptian society- have different stance towards "*Biladbarah* or *abroad*". Metwally the driver with whom Zahira has escaped returns back to find much respect, because gap between classes has vanished where the job of a driver is not treated in the same old way as aristocratic class has vanished and with them all their prerogatives. Zahira whose lust has destroyed her prestigious position returns to a new society where her husband- the low born- becomes the master. Even the very weak expressions that she still utter which remind her of her origin quickly vanish in face of the absolute subjugation to the domination of her husband Metwally which she accepts voluntarily. This is an indication to an essential change occurred in the society realized by all parties.

Shaw deals with the problem of prostitution artistically through the theme of conscience which creates conflict between "a coarse mother, Mrs. Warren, and a cold daughter, Miss Vivie Warren. Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* best shows the conflict between individualism and social forces. Vivie cuts herself off from her own mother when she discovers the source of her income. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* urges the audience to examine the problem of the exploitation of women in British society through challenging the idea that working as a prostitute is immoral. In addition, the play implicitly suggests that many people share responsibility for women's exploitation. In revealing to her daughter Vivie that she has worked as a prostitute and brothel-owner, Ms. Warren defends why the conditions for working women forced her into this "profession". Vivie's attitude towards her mother's profession reflects the complicated social verdict on the issue of prostitution. Despite her compassion for her mother's choice, Vivie is less sympathetic to the fact that Mrs. Warren has continued to run a brothel even after becoming rich, due to the fact that she has become part of a system that exploits women's bodies.

The same moral dilemma is encountered in Ashour's *Abroad* in the conflict between Zahira and her father Elbasha. She rejects the authority of her father, his capitalism and his money, she defies family values and break social habits, she

leaves her father's home and migrates abroad. As a sign of victory she marries (her driver). Like Vivie, she rejects her father's money and social status.

The generations gap between parents and their children is also elaborated in similar ways in the two plays. In Mrs. Warren's profession, conflicts begin when Mrs. Warren invites her best and notorious friends: Praed, Sir George Crofts, Rev. S. Gardner and Frank for supper. In course of their formal conversation, Mrs. Warren proposes matrimonial alliance to her daughter with Mr. Frank. Mrs. Warren asserts her own will on terms that, although Frank is different from her daughter, they are a good match. While Vivie has little direct knowledge of her mother, she is presented as being her mother's daughter.

In the final scenes of the play, there is a confrontation between Mrs. Warren and Vivie. Mrs. Warren thinks at first that her daughter is upset with her because she expected more money from her. Vivie wants none of her money. She rejects Mrs. Warren's materialistic offers. We also find another struggle in the play between proposed marriage and forbidden sexual desire. Frank desires to have a relationship with Mrs. Warren and Vivie, Sir George Crofts proposes marriage to Vivie despite his relationship with her mother, and perhaps Vivie is his illegitimate daughter. Vivie refuses to marry Frank and Crofts just because she refuses to be a prey manipulated by such immoral people.

Ashour's *Abroad* is similarly rife with conflicts, specially the emotional conflict between the father's feelings and his daughter, which is essentially an intellectual conflict between capitalist thought, class and power, and between socialism, equality and freedom. This conflict begins when Zahira, Nader Bek's cousin, refuses the love of Nader Bek and marries Metwally, in spite of the social gap between them, and her family's disapproval long before socialist ideas were implemented in Egypt. As a result they had to leave the country.

Metwally: Nader Bek drove me out of my country. I washed dishes and painted walls. I served in hotels and drove trucks. It's true I'm a driver and when I left Egypt I was a driver, but, he deprived me of living in my country in the prime of my youth. And its youth

Zahera: thank God we left before the earthquake

Mitwally: I'm sorry... He is your nephew and you have the right to be upset about your family.

Zahera: My family? I don't have any family! You are my family. (*Abroad*, 371).

"Metwally and Zaheira lived abroad for many years and only returned after the change brought by the 1952 Revolution. The new social system in Egypt deprived the class of Nader Bek and his family of their social status and made an attempt at creating a society where individuals enjoy equal opportunities and are liberated from the restrictions of the rigid class system of the extinct pre-revolution era. However, due to certain subversive elements pertaining to the Revolutionary regime, people like Nader Bek still exerting some power"

Another conflict is the social hypocrisy represented by Nader Bek, who tries to deceive the lower class by pushing them to leave the country and travel abroad. Like the capitalists in Shaw's plays, Nader Bek like Sir George Crofts, is doing illegal work, he is the capitalist evil element who tries to divorce Zahira and Metwally in various ways, just like Mr. Crofts, who has tried to separate Frank and Vivie. He establishes a tourism company so that he can get Zaheira and her husband back from abroad and offers Zaheira a job which she sees as an attempt to keep her away from Metwally and, therefore, rejects the offer.

In Shaw's play *The relationship between mother and daughter* is conceived with a combination of idealism and realism; Vivie cites the similarity between them as the very reason they must part ways: "I am my mother's daughter." I am like you: I must have work, and must make more money than I spend" (*Mrs. Warren's Profession*, 81). Despite that, they differ regarding what they believe is right and wrong, and the idealistic level, but they live a bitter reality full of corruption and women's injustice.

For Vivie, morality is dependent on being true to oneself. She refuses to marry Frank and Grofts just because she does not want to be married. She denies a relationship with her mother because it would not make her happy. The idea of morality and idealism upheld by the wealthy arises again in the final conversation between Vivie and Mrs. Warren, with Vivie pointing out how false it is. She decries the pretense of "fashionable morality" (*Mrs. Warren's Profession*, 19).

In Ashour's *People Upstairs* and *Abroad*, the marriages of Tity and Hassan on the one hand, and Zaheira and Metwalli on the other hand do not aim at joining a certain social class on the part of both Hassan and Metwalli. On the contrary, these two marriages reflect a certain approach to marriage that takes into consideration only emotional compatibility and personal choice. A frequently used tool is the antithesis between idealism and realism. The same proposition is expressed in Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, in which the transformation of Vivie's character arouses questions about the validity of the class system in England, already investigated in Shaw's article "Redistribution of Income".

Irony and sarcasm are two of the major writing techniques that has been adopted by both Shaw and Ashour, in their plays. The versatile use of them can help forge their dramas, combine moral passion and intellectual conflicts.

As we see, Mrs. Warren ridicules the hypocrisy of the British society. Vivie can no longer tolerate her obscure knowledge of her mother's past. She cannot accept being the only one that doesn't know her mother's history. And who is her father?

The similarity between the two in many aspects is very high. The argument, the construction and the language, each create a new type of drama that transforms melodramatic conventions and uses ridicule through comedy to enhance views, with their ability to link drama, comedies, and social therapy together. The sarcastic and comic effect in his 'drama of ideas' contains some techniques such as recoil, rapid transformations, reversals, sudden unexpected positions, the difference between the external appearance and the substance of things, and the effective use of sarcastic parallels and verbal paradoxes "".(Kadija,68-73),in all of these points Ashour was influenced by Bernard Shaw.

Classic woman and a new woman

Vivie's character as "a new woman", she defies the Victorian rules and styles of a weak obedient woman; she is educated and full of self-sufficiency. She refuses proposals for marriage; she is asexual and has no romantic tendencies, reflecting her reliance on labor ethics and a hard-line approach to life. It is true that Vivie Warren has a chance to get a good job and can therefore abandon her mother's money and lead an independent life, and therefore achieve individual reform

Zahira like Vivie, represents the model of the new woman who abandons her father and travels with her lover without return until her father died. Ashour's Zahira like Shaw's Vivie, represents the model of the new woman who abandons her father and travels with her lover without return until her father died, without taking into account the paternal feelings, she decided to throw the money her father back. Zahira wasn't willing to take advantage of the opportunities her father had provided for her. She is Always looking forward to work and get a job, and therefore achieve individual reform. . Zahira is a new woman in the face of Nader Bek's hypocrisy and his capitalist corruption in light of the economic need and lack of employment opportunities among women, in keeping with the purpose of Shaw and Ashour, is to reach an ideal society by criticizing the oppressive reality of women and society. Moral passion and intellectual conflicts between Vivie and her mother is same moral passion conflict between Zahira and her father, and intellectual conflicts, we find it as much as Shaw.

To conclude from the above analysis, it has become clear that there is considerable similarity between Ashour and Shaw's plays in depicting class struggle the emergence of New Woman. Their works discuss and often criticize the harsh reality in which people live, which is highlighted through realism and feminism. The play breaks the silence imposed on such taboo topic as prostitution and forces people to think about the social and economic conditions that make prostitution the best choice for many women. The play also criticizes labor conditions for women. Similarly Ashour's play exposes the manipulative nature of the capitalist system with its moral, ethical and financial corruption and deficiencies.

This similarity attracted me to make this comparative study between the two writers in two plays for each of them for highlighting this meaning. Similar to Shaw, Ashour is well versed in incorporating humor, most prominently dark humor to discuss serious issues.

To conclude Ashour has been greatly influenced by Shaw in many various aspects that transforms melodramatic conventions and uses ridicule through comedy to enhance views, with their ability to link drama, comedies, and social therapy together. The sarcastic and comic effect in his 'drama of ideas' contains some techniques such as recoil, rapid transformations, reversals, sudden unexpected positions, the difference between the external appearance and the substance of things, and the effective use of sarcastic parallels and verbal paradoxes in all of these points Ashour was influenced by Bernard Shaw irony and sarcasm are two of the major writing techniques Shaw and Ashour, they adopted in their plays.

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